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EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

AVENGERS®

THE STUNNING RETURN OF THE MOST UNEXPECTED AVENGER EVER!

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

THE CROSSING

BY HARRAS KAYANAUGH WYMAN PALMER

AND IT ISN'T THE SWORDSMAN!

RAMOS PALMER

HE STANDS IN THE MORNING SUN LIKE A GLEAMING, GLITTERING BEACON.

HIS ARMORED FORM MOVES WITH A FLUID, ALMOST LIQUID GRACE AS HE SURVEYS THE SCENE BEFORE HIM, CATCHING THE EARLY LIGHT AND REFLECTING IT BACK A HUNDREDFOLD...

HE IS CALLED, BY SOME, THE GOLDEN AVENGER--FOR OBV!OUS REASONS.

AND HE HAS COME HERE TO SEAL OFF THE PLACE HE ONCE CALLED HOME--

--BUT NOW FEARS.

THE FINAL COMPONENT IS BEING LIFTED INTO PLACE NOW, *IRON MAN.*

THE PRO-TECTIVE GRID SHOULD BE ON-LINE BY 1300 HOURS, JUST LIKE *MR. STARK* ORDERED.

Stan Lee Presents the Avengers In:

THE PAST IS WITH US ALWAYS...

BOB HARRAS and TERRY KAVANAGH • story
M.C. WYMAN • guest penciler
TOM PALMER • inker
FRANK LOPEZ • colorist
MALIBU • computer color
OAKLEY / N.J.Q • letterers
RALPH MACCHIO • editor
MARK GRUENWALD • editor in chief

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THAT'S GREAT, SMITTY.

MR. STARK IS DETERMINED THAT ALL ACCESS TO THE MANSION BE BLOCKED BY TODAY.

AND THESE FORCE FIELD GENERATORS HE DESIGNED OUGHT TO DO THE JOB.

KINDA WEIRD, SEALIN' OFF *AVENGER'S MANSION* AN' ALL.

I MEAN WHAT HAPPENED? DID THE HEROES FORGET T'PAY THE RENT OR SOMETHING?

I *TEND* TO THINK IT'S A BIT MORE SERIOUS THAN THAT, SMITTY.

IN THE COURTYARD BELOW, TWO AVENGERS, THE SYNTHEZOID VISION AND THE APTLY--IF SOMEWHAT UNIMAGINATIVELY-- NAMED GIANT MAN WATCH--

CAN'T SAY *TONY STARK* LET THE GRASS GROW UNDER HIS FEET ON THIS ONE, VISH.

HENRY, LOOK.

WE EVACUATED LAST NIGHT AND--

THAT GIRDER APPEARS MISALIGNED. IT MAY--

SNAP!

SMASHH!

ARRGHH!

GO LIMP--

--I'VE GOT YOU!

OOOF!

THE *WHOLE* STRUCTURE'S COLLAPSING!

THE CROWD ON FIFTH AVENUE WILL BE CRUSHED--!

REPULSOR RAYS SET ON WIDE-DISPERSAL OUGHT TO DO THE TRICK.

FZAAAAAM

FZAMMMM

"AND BABY-- THEY DO!"

FZZATST

I'LL HAVE A FULL REPORT ON THIS *TONIGHT!* THAT TYPE OF INCIDENT DOESN'T HAPPEN AT *STARK.*

IT JUST DOESN'T.

PARISSI, SENSOR REPORT?

SCANNING SWEEP REPORTS NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY, SIR.

EM LEVELS, RADIATION FIELDS--ALL PERFECTLY *NORMAL.*

TWO PEOPLE WERE MURDERED HERE LAST NIGHT, PARISSI.

I DON'T CON SIDER THAT NORMAL AND NEITHER DOES MR. STARK.

THERE'S SOME-THING *WRONG* HERE AND HE WANTS US TO *FIND* IT. GOT THAT?

GOT IT.

TONY, I KNOW THE LAST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS HAVE BEEN *HARD* ON YOU... THEY'VE BEEN HARD ON *ALL* OF US...

...BUT YOU'RE WOUND TIGHTER THAN A DRUM. TAKE IT FROM ONE WHO KNOWS, YOU WON'T DO ANYONE ANY GOOD IF YOU *SNAP.*

THANKS FOR THE TIP, HIGH-POCKETS.

I'LL KEEP IT IN MIND.

THIS IS THE PLACE, AVENGERS.

ACCORDING TO OUR *BEST* GUESS, *THIS* IS WHERE *MARILLA* WAS KILLED.

IT STILL SEEMS *IMPOSSIBLE* TO BELIEVE IT HAPPENED OR TO UNDERSTAND *WHY.*

MARILLA WAS LUNA'S NANNY. SHE WASN'T A THREAT TO *ANYONE.*

hmmm--NOW *THIS* IS AN INTERESTING PIECE OF WORK.

WHAT *IS* IT?

THAT?

JUST SOMETHING I'VE BEEN FIDDLING WITH.

I MUST DEPART.

THE BLACK WIDOW IS EXPECTING A STATUS REPORT AT OUR TEMPORARY SOUTHAMPTON HEADQUARTERS BEFORE I AM TO JOURNEY UPSTATE TO CONFER WITH THE SWORDSMAN.

FAREWELL.

TONY, I *KNOW* YOU'RE UPSET, BUT WE *WILL* FIND OUT WHO DID THIS.

WE HAVE TO, HANK.

WE *HAVE* TO. IF MARILLA WAS KILLED BY A VILLAIN TRYING TO GET AT *US*, I'LL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF.

NEVER.

UPSTATE NEW YORK...

...WHERE THE ADVENTURER KNOWN AS THE SWORDSMAN ENTERS A SMALL SYLVAN GLADE.

HE HAS SPENT HOURS TRYING TO FIND THIS SPOT, DEEP IN THE FOREST.

HE'S BEEN HERE BEFORE, LURED BY THE SOUND OF A LUTE PLAYING IN THE NIGHT.

THERE'D BEEN A BOY HERE THAT NIGHT-- THE ENIGMATIC FORTUNE TELLER CALLED TUC-- AND AN OLDER MAN WHO SPOKE SADLY OF A LOST, FORGOTTEN PLACE.

AND THEN, IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, THEY BOTH VANISHED AS IF THEY NEVER WERE.

THE SWORDSMAN HAD HALF CONVINCED HIMSELF IT HAD ALL BEEN A DREAM.

UNTIL NOW.

UNTIL THIS PRETERNATURALLY GREEN AND QUIET PLACE.

WHAT THE--!?

WITH A SUDDENESS THAT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE, THE GRASS IN THE CENTRAL MEADOW BEGINS TO GROW--

--TO WEAVE TOGETHER--

--IN A FRENZY OF ENERGY--

--GATHERING TWIGS AND VINES UNTO ITSELF--

--AND LEAVING IN ITS WAKE, A MOST ASTOUNDING CREATURE.

ONE WITH THE VERY IMAGE OF LONG-DEAD ORIGINAL SWORDSMAN

I SEE TUC WAS RIGHT. YOU ARE VERY LIKE THE *HOST* BODY.

I SEE I HAVE *FRIGHTENED* YOU. SUCH WAS NOT MY INTENTION.

I AM AN EMISSARY OF THE *COTATI*--A CREATURE OF THE *GREENWASH*, OF A SPECIES *KNOWN* TO YOUR ALLIES, THE AVENGERS.

TELL ME, HUMAN--WHY DID YOU NOT *HEED* OUR WARNING AND SEEK OUT THE HEROES?

TH-THEY'RE SENDING THE VISION, BUT--BUT--

WHAT IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN *ARE* YOU?

A FRIEND. AND THE AVENGERS WILL NEED MANY IF THEY ARE TO SURVIVE OUR MUTUAL ENEMIES' MACHINATIONS.

BUT IT IS TOO LATE.

YOUR ALLY, THE VISION, ARRIVES--

--BUT BEHIND HIM, THE SKY TWISTS AND MELTS. THE DIMENSIONS FALL AWAY. *SHE* IS COMING.

"THEY'VE *FOUND* ME."

WE HAVE MADE THE *CROSSING*, COUSINS.

AND THE COTATI GREENLING STANDS BELOW, *RIPE* FOR THE TAKING.

DON'T TELL US *OUR* BUSINESS, GIRL... JUST RECALIBRATE YOUR INSTRUMENTS. WE BARELY MADE IT THROUGH THE PORTAL!

WE *KNOW* THE SCUM ALL RIGHT.

MALACHI, FIRST BLOOD IS TO YOU!

NO, BROTHER, YOU ARE THE *ELDER*.

TAKE THE PLANT-THING DOWN.

FOR ALL YOUR RACE HAS DONE TO OUR FAMILY, COTATI!

I PRAY YOU ROT!

FZZMM

MMM

FHASHAMMM!

GET BACK!

MY SWORD SHOULD *DEFLECT* THIS BLAST!

IT APPEARS THE SWORDSMAN WAS NOT IN ERROR WHEN HE CONTACTED THE AVENGERS.

THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE COTATI LIFEFORM INDICATES AN OLD PERIL HAS REASSERTED ITSELF.

TOBIAS, THE PLANT THING HAS FRIENDS.

AS ALWAYS, THEY FIND *FOOLS* TO FIGHT THEIR BATTLES.

YOU BLAME MY PEOPLE FOR YOUR FAMILY'S WOES, TOBIAS?

LOOK TO YOUR FATHER *AND* YOUR MOTHER. IT IS *THEIR* TWISTED AMBITION THAT MAY BRING RUIN TO US *ALL*.

WITH A WAVE OF THE COTATI'S HAND, THE VEGETATIVE MATTER IN THE GLADE GOES WILD--

--WITH LITTLE RESULT.

YOUR TRICKS ARE *KNOWN* TO US, GREEN-LING.

OUR MOTHER TAUGHT US MANY THINGS. SUCH AS, *ANY* ATTACK ON A PLANT YOU ARE IN EMPATHIC CONNECTION WITH--

SLASK!

*"--IS AN ATTACK ON *YOU*!"*

ARRRGHH!

MALACHI, *QUICKLY*!

WE *HAVE* HIM!

YOU'LL HAVE TO GET THROUGH *ME* FIRST, PUNK!

PLEASE.

MY SWORD--!?

SLASKHH!

SLAMM!

ARRGHH!

AND OFF TO THE SIDE, A YOUNG WOMAN WATCHES THE BATTLE--

--AND *MOURNS* ITS OUTCOME.

AND FOUR HUNDRED MILES TO THE SOUTH AND EAST--

MAMA! PAPA!

THE BAD MAN IS COMING! THE BAD MAN!

--AT THE AVENGERS' TEMPORARY HEADQUARTERS AT THE VAN DYNE ESTATE IN SOUTH HAMPTON, LONG ISLAND...

I DON'T LIKE THIS, PIETRO.

LUNA IS GROWING MORE UPSET BY THE HOUR. SHE'S CRYING SO HARD, SHE CAN BARELY BREATHE.

SHOULD WE CALL THE DOCTOR, CRYSTAL?

THAT MAY NOT BE A BAD IDEA, CRYS.

I MEAN, THE POOR KID IS SUFFERING.

MARILLA WOULD HAVE KNOWN WHAT TO DO.

SHE...SHE HAD THE MAGIC TOUCH.

I WANT 'RILLA, MAMA!

OH, BABY, SHE'D BE HERE IF SHE COULD.

SHE *LOVED* YOU VERY MUCH, BUT MARILLA'S... GONE, LUNA.

DID THE BAD MAN HURT HER, TOO?

"TOO"? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, LUNA?

L-LIKE THE LADY AT THE DOOR. THE LADY WHO BURN AWAY.

"THE LADY AT THE DOOR"?

OH, SWEET AGON, PIETRO! COULD SHE MEAN YELLOW-JACKET?

WHAT IF LUNA *SAW* SOMETHING LAST NIGHT?

THEN--HEAVEN HELP US--OUR DAUGHTER MAY HOLD THE CLUE TO THOSE MURDERS!

"AND THAT COULD MEAN, SHE IS IN *GRAVE* DANGER."

MR. STARK, WE'VE FINISHED THE SCANS--AND CAME UP WITH *ZIP.*

IRON MAN TOLD US HOW CONCERNED YOU ARE--BUT, SIR, THERE'S JUST *NOTHING* OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

I APPRE-CIATE YOUR HARD WORK, PARISSI.

um...IRON MAN TOLD ME HOW HE *SNAPPED* AT YOU EARLIER, AND WANTED ME TO APOLOGIZE FOR HIM. HE KNOWS YOU AND YOUR MEN ARE THE *BEST.*

TELL SHELLHEAD NO HARD FEELINGS. G'NIGHT, SIR.

GOOD NIGHT, PARISSI.

HOW *WEIRD.*

THIS PLACE ALWAYS *HUMMED* WITH LIFE. NOW, IT'S LIKE A--

--WHAT'S THIS!?

THE DEVICE HANK FOUND DOWNSTAIRS.

HOW DID IT GET IN MY POCKET?

AND WHY--

--DOES IT *SEEM* SO--

--FAMILIAR?

THE WORLD DROPS AWAY--

--AND, IN THE SPACE OF A HEARTBEAT, HE FINDS HIMSELF IN THE VOID.

A PLACE OF SUCH RESOUNDING SILENCE--

--THAT HE COULD HEAR THE POUNDING OF HIS TRANSPLANTED HEART.

THE POUNDING INCREASES--AND FOR A MOMENT, THE OLD FEAR OF DEATH HAUNTS HIM.

BUT IT PASSES, TO BE REPLACED BY A NEW DREAD.

AND HOW HARD IT POUNDS.

IS IT FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN?

NO. FOR SOMEHOW TONY STARK KNOWS HE HAS BEEN TO THIS COLD PLACE BEFORE.

THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE IS NO LONGER ALONE.

DEAR, DEAR ANTHONY, I SHOULD BE QUITE ANGRY WITH YOU--

YOU WERE CARELESS.

THE CHILD SAW YOU. SHE MUST BE DEALT WITH.

PLEASE...

HAVEN'T I DONE ENOUGH?

I BEG YOU--

--DON'T MAKE ME DO THIS.

WHAT'S THIS?

A TEAR?

THE MIGHTY IRON MAN REDUCED TO TEARS. YOU ARE NOT AS STRONG AS OTHERS BELIEVE--AS YOU YOURSELF BELIEVE.

BUT, ALAS, POOR ANTHONY--THE DIE IS CAST AND WE HAVE NO ROOM FOR TEARS ANY LONGER.

UPSTATE.

I DO NOT KNOW THE REASON BEHIND THIS BATTLE, BUT THE COTATI WERE A PACIFISTIC RACE--

--AND THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT OF YOUR INTENT.

FZZZK

NO AVENGER CAN STAND BY AND ALLOW SUCH MURDEROUS VIOLENCE TO TAKE PLACE.

IN THE TREES, ON THE EDGE OF THE CLEARING--

--A FIGURE STIRS.

BY THE GREEN! THE BROTHERS HAVE COME HERE!

THINGS ARE HAPPENING *DIFFERENTLY* THAN HISTORY RECORDED.

THEY MUST *NOT* CLAIM THE GREEN LORD. IF HE FALLS INTO *HER* HANDS--

HOLD, *TUC.*

WHA--!?

IT IS NOT YET YOUR TIME.

BUT--!

"...AFTER ALL, WHAT IS TIME TO BEINGS LIKE US?"

DO NOT QUESTION, YOUNG ONE...

INTERESTING, AVENGER.

YOUR SOLAR BEAMS ARE *NEARLY* AS POWERFUL AS MY OWN.

SZZZZZ

YES. I HAVE NOTED THE SIMILARITY.

UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU, I WAS NOT NEAR FULL INTENSITY--

--UNTIL NOW.

WHA--!?

BY THE ETERNAL--!

EASY, BROTHER.

NO ONE WILL BEST YOU WHILE I LIVE!

FSAHAMMM

BOTH THE VISION AND THE SWORDS-MAN--DOWN.

I MUST--

WHAT, PLANT-THING? GET AWAY?

I THINK NOT!

FZAAMMM

YOU HAVE HIM! THE PRIZE IS WON!

NOW-- TO DISPATCH WITH THESE TWO, SO THERE WILL BE *NO* WITNESSES.

NO!
COUSINS, THERE IS NO MORE TIME!
I CANNOT MAINTAIN THE PORTAL ANY LONGER. IF WE DON'T MAKE THE CROSSING NOW--WE MAY NEVER GET HOME!
WE DON'T ASK FOR MUCH, GIRL. JUST DO YOUR JOB--AND LET US DO OURS!
I TOLD YOU, EVERY SECOND COUNTS.
YOU *HAVE* THE COTATI. IT IS WHAT YOUR MOTHER WANTED.
TO BE TRAPPED HERE *DENIES* HER HER GREATEST WISH!
THE GIRL SPEAKS TRUTH, BROTHER.
AND I WOULD NOT BREAK MY WORD TO OUR MOTHER--

--FOR ALL THE ENDLESS RICHES TIME WOULD ALLOW.

THEY'RE GONE--JUST LIKE THAT?

YES. MUCH LIKE THE MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANTS WHO ATTACKED GILGAMESH BEFORE HE DIED.*

THE FEMALE WAS LYING, SWORDSMAN. I HEARD IT IN HER VOICE.

*SEE THE CROSSING:--RALF-ING

SHE OBVIOUSLY WANTED HER "COUSINS" GONE BEFORE THEY COULD DESTROY US.

BUT WHY WOULD SHE WANT TO HELP US?

"I DO NOT HAVE THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION, PHILIP.

"BUT I SAW THE WAY SHE LOOKED AT US. AND THERE WAS AFFECTION IN HER EYES."

SOMEPLACE ELSE...

...BEYOND A GREAT CROSSING.

THE LORDS HAVE RETURNED!

THAT WE HAVE, STEWARD.

AND WITH A PRIZE WELL WORTH THE DANGER OF OUR JOURNEY.

THE GREEN-LING!?

YOUR PARENTS WILL BE OVER-JOYED. THIS IS THE FIRST GOOD NEWS SINCE THE RETREAT!

UNFORTUNATELY, YOUR FATHER IS AWAY ON TOUR OF THE BORDERS--

--BUT YOUR *MOTHER* AWAITS WITHIN.

SO, MY SONS. YOU HAVE RE-TURNED--

--AND BROUGHT WITH YOU A *MOST* PRECIOUS GIFT, I SEE.

CAN IT BE, MY FIRST, LEAST HUSBAND--

--THAT YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN YOUR BELOVED *MANTIS*?

I ASSURE YOU, SHE HAS *NEVER* FORGOTTEN YOU!

WHAT'S THIS?

NO WORDS OF ENDEAR-MENT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?

TO BE CONTINUED!

ZONE